To the Medical Society of Lon
from the Author.

LETTER

TO THE

METROPOLITAN COMMISSIONERS

IN

LUNACY.

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2019 with funding from
Wellcome Library

https://archive.org/details/b30797044

A

LETTER

TO THE

METROPOLITAN COMMISSIONERS

IN

LUNACY;

CONTAINING

SOME STRICTURES ON THE ACT OF PARLIAMENT,

AND

OBSERVATIONS ON THEIR REPORT.

By J. HASLAM, M.D.

OF THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS OF LONDON.

LONDON:

WHITTAKER, TREACHER AND CO.

AVE-MARIA-LANE.

1830.

ROYAL MEDICAL SOCIETY LONDON
K d 21

PRINTED BY G. HAYDEN,
LITTLE COLLEGE STREET, WESTMINSTER.

TO THE

Metropolitan Commissioners in Lunacy.

GENTLEMEN,

With feelings of respect, I have the honor to address the present Letter to your consideration. It will endeavour to point out some features in the "Act to regulate the Care and Treatment of Insane Persons in England," and likewise in the "Report from the Metropolitan Commissioners in Lunacy," that appear to be deserving of notice. As far as my inquiries have extended, no individual of the medical profession has hitherto ventured to give publicity to his opinions on these subjects, and it is not improbable that some of my brethren may entertain very opposite sentiments, to certain suggestions that are contained in the pages of the present pamphlet. The only apology necessary to be offered is the assurance, that my objects have been the honor and dignity of the healing art; and if these attributes have been in any manner degraded by the Act under

which you exercise your jurisdiction, or in the Report you have made, the exposition of such inferior consideration will be viewed as a manly and generous effort by the medical profession. Whatever legislative act tends to augment and secure the liberty of the subject, must be considered a wise and salutary provision; and when the seclusion of disordered individuals is sanctioned by the law, the endeavour to protect them under confinement, is equally laudable and humane. In whatever asylum they may be placed, the means of cure ought to be furnished; the general health should be promoted by adequate exercise and wholesome diet; and when the recovery of the patient has been established and thoroughly ascertained, his liberation ought necessarily to follow. It must be evident that all these desiderata are to be accomplished solely by MEDICAL science and experience. The prominent defect in the Parliamentary Bill under which you act, consists in appointing to the treatment of a disease gentlemen who are altogether ignorant of medical knowledge: because the detection of existing insanity, and the decision of the patient's recovery are submitted to your determination. To this allegation you will of course reply, that a part of your Commission consists of medical practitioners. This is perfectly true; and

it may be added, that they are all gentlemen of learning, of science, and of character, without which qualifications they could not have been admitted to the practice of medicine. If the proportions be compared, we find the Metropolitan Board to consist, according to the Act, of fifteen individuals, only five of whom are of the medical profession; so that, under any prevailing difference of opinion, the medical science and experience of the Doctors would be of little avail, as the numbers on proceeding to the vote would be two to one in favour of the lay brethren. This hybridous compound of gentleman and physician can never assimilate for any public benefit: if in parliamentary metaphysics Insanity be considered other than a disease, then you and the elderly ladies in the metropolis are competent to treat it in all its presentations, and the remedial aid of the physician becomes unnecessary: if it be a morbid affection, and it has been so held by all persons of common sense since the days of Hippocrates, then the incorporation of benevolent ignorance with medical science, will be a serious impediment to the hopeful exertions of the accredited practitioner.

It is a subject of regret, yet I am compelled to feel that the Parliamentary Bill has considered the

medical practitioner and his art with no extraordinary respect, by having confided the treatment of an important disease to gentlemen who possess not the slightest claim to the exercise of those functions, by which it is to be alleviated. A total disregard of professional rank equally pervades the different clauses of the Bill, so that a Fellow or Licentiate of the College of Physicians is merely on a level with a person who states that he practised pharmacy before the year 1815, and who belongs to no college or medical corporation whatever. In all the learned professions gradations of rank are established—the medical Commissioners in your own Board are of the class of physicians, and the wisdom of such appointment is conspicuous, because difficult cases are not of infrequent occurrence, and the treatment of Insanity has been justly considered to be the peculiar province of the experienced physician. On this principle, and in the event of your Bill being amended, I may venture to suggest that, to every certificate which consigns an individual to an asylum for the insane, one of the subscribers ought to be a Fellow or Licentiate of the College. At present, the certificate itself is the mere dictum of the person who signs it; and when the Commissioners visit him in his seclusion, they are totally unacquainted

with his history and with such acts and opinions as amount to insanity in the judgment of those who have personally and separately examined him. These particulars ought to be transmitted by letter to your office, and, as they frequently consist of the most extravagant perversions, or are accompanied by conduct that might be deemed criminal, if the insanity were not clearly established, it is presumed that such documents would not be wantonly exposed. Without this necessary information you will often be disappointed, conceive the person to have been improperly confined, and perhaps urge the liberation of an individual dangerous to the community. Such exposure of the foundations of medical opinion is always insisted on when evidence of insanity is tendered in a court of common law, and especially on an inquisition de lunatico inquirendo, and there appears every reason that the same facilities should be afforded to the Metropolitan Commissioners in Lunacy.

To render your Bill still more efficient and useful, the renewal of these certificates at stated periods by competent medical authority, would materially assist your inquiries; and such attestation of the continuance of the individual's insanity, ought to

set forth the circumstances on which the certificate is renewed.

There is likewise another important circumstance that is deserving of your serious consideration, and which, in my own estimate, is intimately blended with the dignity of a learned profession. That considerable fortunes have been accumulated by the proprietors of receptacles for the insane is sufficiently known; and when persons of this description conduct their establishments with liberality towards the patients, exercising the necessary restraint with humanity and reluctance, and contriving to increase their comforts, they become highly respectable members of society, and are fully entitled to the emoluments they receive. Whoever may become the proprietor of a house of such description must be regarded as a person deriving his income from trade, and be exposed to all the contingencies of traffic. Like a publican he must attend the meetings of your Board for the grant and renewal of his licence, and although your urbanity and kindness are proverbial on these occasions, the non-compliance of the proprietor with such arrangements as you may please to dictate or suggest, subjects him to its revocation or discontinuance. This species of farming human beings, these

accurate estimates of the sufficiency of aliment, where parsimony and profit are inseparable, appear unsuited to the respectability of a learned profession. The physician, like the barrister, receives an honorary remuneration for his advice and attendance, and if the fee be not forthcoming when he makes his visit, he must rest contented, as it is not recoverable; this is the unenviable distinction of the higher class of the medical profession; but if the same individual carries in his bill for board, care, washing, lodging, medicines, wine, and a long catalogue of extras, he is enabled to sue the party and recover the amount. This process of amalgamating the dealer and chapman with the physician, appears to be equally incongruous and derogatory. For the present, these remarks terminate my animadversions on the Bill, and, with equal respect and freedom, I shall now proceed to the consideration of your Report.

It may be conceived, in the preceding part of this Letter, that my zealous endeavours to maintain the dignity of the medical profession, and to protect it from the usurpation of unqualified persons, may have led me to exalt its character at the expense of the Parliamentary Commissioners: but, as truth has solely impelled me to these comments, unalloyed with the

feelings that are likely to ensue from the invasion of the medical office, it will here be lawful and, consequently, not irreverend, to institute a generous comparison between the physician and the member of Parliament. The former must have received a classical education, which his duties oblige him to retain and display to the latest period of his practical existence. His medical studies constrain him for some years to acquire a competent knowledge of anatomy, physiology and pathology, at the imminent hazard of his health, in the stench of the dissecting-room, and in the infected atmosphere of the hospital. Of his attendance on those schools where medical knowledge is imparted, he must produce the certificates, and, before he can commence his professional career, he must submit to personal examinations at the constituted tribunals, where he is expected to afford satisfactory evidence that he possesses the attainments of learning, medical science, and MORAL CHARACTER. Even after he has been admitted to the practice of his profession, in order to become useful to the community, to be commensurate with the progress of his competitors, and to feel the consciousness of performing his duty, he must still continue the exertions of a student.

It has never been held a necessary condition that a member of Parliament should receive any preparatory education: nor have any exclusive colleges, schools, or gymnasia been established to train him up to this important and honorable representation. If he has attained the state of manhood, and possesses property of a certain description, to a definite amount, his qualifications are complete. There is no previous survey of his intellectual capacities, nor any valuation of his learning. Although allowed the utmost freedom of speech he is not compelled to avail himself of the licence; but, through successive Parliaments, may confine the expression of his opinions to the mere monosyllables of acquiescence and dissent.

"de MORIBUS ultima fiet
"Quæstio: quot pascit servos? quot possidet AGRI
"JUGERA?"—*Juv.* 3 *Sat.*

For reasons that will be subsequently adduced, the Report, both in its reasonings and in the structure of its sentences, bears little of the evidence of medical composition: it displays more of the confident and didactic tone of St. Stephen's Chapel than of the accurate and unassuming phraseology of Pall-Mall-East.

The Report involves some doctrines that require elucidation, and probably correction: it is therefore improper that unfounded opinions should go forth to the world, to mislead its inhabitants and disgrace the medical profession. In page 3d of the Report we find "the number of patients cured or materially "relieved is so small compared with the total num- "ber of those under confinement, as to strengthen "our own observations of the IMPERFECTION OF THE "PRESENT SYSTEM, so far as it is connected with "restoration to reason of those who may be justly "considered capable of recovery." Having arrived at a conclusion that the present system is imperfect, it was incumbent on you to point out the nature of such imperfection, wherein it consisted, and to direct some other system to be pursued, by which Lunatics would be more certainly restored to their reason. This you have omitted; and no one can suppose you would conceal that information which might be instrumental to the cure of insanity, if you were really in possession of such knowledge. Before we can accurately and positively declare any doctrine or system to be wrong, erroneous or imperfect, we must have some standard of that which is right, correct and perfect, and it must be demonstrated to deflect from such criterion. Does this imperfection con-

sist in an excess or deficiency of bleeding, vomiting, or purging? in administering or withholding the tribe of narcotic poisons, belladonna, conium, hyosciamus, opium and prussic acid? Does it arise from protracted confinement or severity of coercion, or is too much liberty permitted to the sallies of the madman's dangerous volition? These are points, towards the elucidation of which, the smallest contributions will be thankfully received. If you should not be prepared, after the experience acquired by "three regular visitations and several casual visits" to rectify these imperfections, neither the public nor the medical profession will feel disappointed. The concluding part of the sentence, is still more calculated to excite surprise, and according to logical precision, ought to have preceded the former: because the affirmative proposition, that fewer persons recover from insanity than "a rational expectation justifies" would have induced the inference that the present system was imperfect. It is generally understood that insane persons are restored to mental competency, by appropriate remedial agents, and by such occupation and rational direction of their intellects as may be suited to their several conditions. These latter attempts have been termed moral management, a science at present very little understood, but to an

intimate knowledge of which most persons, especially such as are least qualified, urge the strongest pretensions. Was it a rational expectation that any act of parliament would arrest the transports of furious insanity, or convert the gloom and despair of melancholic depression into gaiety and hope? Allow me to ask you, what, under the circumstances of recent attack, and with the immediate assistance of the best medical aid, is the percentage of recoveries that a "rational expectation justifies?" This question you will be unable to answer, without referring to those disputed authorities, who have multiplied their cures for the hopes of emolument. If there be any actual diminution of the numbers formerly restored, which is very difficult to ascertain, there is no cause to which it can be more probably attributed, than the passing of the present Bill, and the establishment of the Metropolitan Committee, which, from the impediments they have created, the penalties they have threatened, and the exposure of private calamity, have induced persons to retain their relations at home in preference to sending them to a licensed asylum: and into the bosom of a private family, it is to be hoped your official scrutinies may never be allowed to penetrate.

The framers of the Bill, without any knowledge of the subject, and against all reasoning and experience, have set forth in the 38th Clause, that " the " hopes and consolations of religion may soothe and " compose the minds of the patients, and thereby " tend to subdue the malady under which they are " suffering." Such is confessedly the great desideratum in cases of insanity; and if these religious opiates and demulcents could soothe a raving paroxysm, or compose the distractions of mind that are indicated by delusions, morbid hostilities, and a propensity to suicide:—could they confer an atom of intellect on existing imbecility, or rouse Idiotism into comprehension, the cure of this malady, ought to be exclusively confided to the clergy. This opinion is not of modern invention: it prevailed very generally in the 16th century, when the doctrine of possession, Diabolo Obsessus, was a favorite assumption, and the expulsion of the fiend intrusted to the exorcism of the priest, or other cunning personages of either sex. The revival of this exploded conceit at the present era is a signal example of the retrogression of the human intellect. If the minds of lunatics can be *soothed* and *composed*, by the *hopes* and *consolations* of religion, and if such administrations actually tended to *subdue* the malady under

which they are suffering, they cannot be too frequently performed; because the only object is to subdue the malady, which is the justifiable cause of their incarceration. If madmen are sufficiently competent to hear, and thoroughly understand Divine Service, there appears no reason why they should be excluded from the other forms and ceremonies of the Church, although the law of the country considers them in no degree responsible for their actions. Aware of either party being insane, would any clergyman proceed to the solemnization of marriage? Is it probable he would read the service for the churching of women to a distracted female labouring under a paroxysm of puerperal madness? Would a Priest permit an avowed Lunatic to communicate? Would a Bishop confirm an individual bereft of his senses, or consecrate a madhouse for the performance of divine service? It is not to be presumed that all the Metropolitan Lunatics are members of the Church of England: common charity revolts at such an inference.—Therefore if the malady of insanity is to be *subdued* by the hopes and consolations of religion, there ought to be a provision of this nature for all the different sects and varieties of faith: especially for the Catholic, for whose worship, there has been lately an extended

concession: yet it is a subject of rational doubt if the confessor would attend to the relation of imaginary delinquencies, impose penance, or confer absolution for enormities that were never perpetrated.

The ordinary occupations of life, for their due performance demand a steady adherence to and thoughtful consideration of the objects of pursuit: the higher exertions of the learned professions imply a comprehensive survey and unwearied devotion to their several subjects, and these labours are stimulated and maintained by the ambitious hopes of future distinctions, honors and emoluments: but the frame of mind in which the creature addresses the Deity presumes humility of approach and consciousness of transgression, and these supplications to the fountain of mercy exact the utmost concentration of the human faculties. The act of prayer involves that perfect abstraction where irrelevant thoughts do not intrude, that tranquil state where passion is extinguished, and where penitence flows from the compunction of the heart and from the energies of reflection. Can it be supposed that a being incapable of fixing his attention, by possessing little voluntary control over his mental faculties, who is constantly distracted by different impulses, and whose serious

belief is founded in delusion :—In such a condition of mind, can it be expected that the pure principles and solemn obligations of the Christian doctrine will interest and persuade? In cases of melancholic depression, where, for imaginary crimes, the miserable sufferer concludes that he is abandoned by the Deity, removed beyond the extension of His mercy, and unfit to live; under which persuasion he seeks every opportunity of self-destruction: can a person so disordered be supposed capable of deriving any benefit from religious consolation? Where the degree of imbecility impedes him from comprehending the meaning of a sentence, or conveying his thoughts intelligibly to others—is such a degraded being the proper subject for Divine Worship?

From your own inquiries, which are promulgated with admirable candour, on the subject of religious consolation, (Report, p. 4) you observe, "it is ob-
"vious that to a large class of them it cannot be
"useful, and to those who are insane on religious
"points, it is stated to us to be not unfrequently
"prejudicial: indeed *we* (the Metropolitan Com-
"missioners in Lunacy) are of opinion, that even
"with regard to those patients who are capable of
"behaving with decency during the celebration of

" Divine Service, VERY FEW, IF ANY, derive real be-
" nefit from it." This is an ample confesssion that the pious projectors of the 38th clause have been seriously mistaken, according to your own inquiries and observations: and if these ghostly therapeutics have failed in subduing the malady of insanity, it is presumed you can have no rational objection to confide the entire treatment of this disease to the medical practitioner. If no real benefit has resulted from the celebration of Divine Service to an insane congregation, common sense would direct its discontinuance: but unhappily, you have been induced to persevere in a practice that has been exploded by your own observation and experience; you even appear to cling, with all the force that prejudice supplies, to an object that has already disappointed, and which never can realize your expectations. What is your apology for this obstinate and perverted adhesion? After having asserted that " very
" few, if any, (insane patients) derive real benefit
" from the celebration of Divine Service," you say, (Report, p. 4 and 5) "we are nevertheless most anx-
" ious that, whenever they can attend with decorum,
" religious service should be regularly performed,
" and we feel this the more desirable, as we cannot
" but contemplate the probability of such a prac-

" tice being most advantageous in its effects on the " KEEPERS, and on others concerned in the care " of the patients." You do not require to be told, that over these keepers you possess no jurisdiction whatever: they are hired, discharged, maintained, and paid by the master of the madhouse: they can only be considered as his servants, and it would be a whimsical inference, that the Bill was passed, and the Metropolitan Commissioners appointed, for the probable advantage of the keepers.

The experience of mankind leads us to conclude that power has uniformly incited the possessor to its exercise. However complicated the machinery of this mighty engine, and how little soever its construction may be understood, the proprietor has always determined to set it in motion. On this principle, and, perhaps, impressed with the " imperfec- " tions of the present system," you have been induced to liberate nine Lunatics from confinement (Report, p. 5.) Of these, by your own confession, it has been necessary to replace three in seclusion. The interval between their discharge and re-admission is not noticed, nor are the other six in any manner accounted for: they are not stated to have returned to their ordinary occupations, or to have

conducted themselves as rational members of society. From the defect of this important information, there is an equal presumption that they may have wandered into other parishes, probably have been imprisoned for offences, placed in asylums beyond your jurisdiction, or have committed suicide in a state of destitution.

It only remains to advert to the paragraphs (Report, page 6) that contain your sentiments concerning a class of persons, whose insanity has justly exempted them from the punishment adjudged to those who have committed crimes under the rational exercise of their mental faculties. They have been usually, but incorrectly, termed CRIMINAL LUNATICS, which misnomer has created much ambiguity in the language of the Report, and has contaminated those principles of enlightened humanity, on which its philosophy ought to have been founded. When these disordered persons, impelled by a furious paroxysm, or acting more deliberately from the dictates of a fatal delusion, have committed any violence on the person or property of others, they are tried by the law; and if, after competent evidence, they are found to have been in that state of mind which absolves them from all responsibility,

they are not punished, but placed in safe and humane custody. The law only regards the condition of the intellect, and not the magnitude of the offence: and the commiseration of Christians is excited in proportion to the atrocity of the deed, which marks the intensity of the malady; the consciousness of which, in the event of their recovery, renders them miserable by reflection, and augments the severity of remorse. The following are the words you have employed:—"We are aware that a "certain part of Bethlem is appropriated to the re- "ception of Criminal Lunatics, but its extent is so "inadequate to the confinement of all those who "are guilty of serious offences, but who are acquit- "ted on the ground of insanity, that we cannot for- "bear from remarking, how very desirable it is, on "every account, that some establishment should be "set apart for the confinement of this class of insane "persons. It is indeed a subject well worthy of "serious consideration, whether the moral effect on "insane persons, either in or out of confinement, "would not be considerable, if those who had com- "mitted offences were confined *in a prison* ex- "pressly adapted for their reception. Many are "the individuals who, labouring under mental ma- "lady, are nevertheless fully capable of judging how

" far their being guilty of crime is likely to conduce
" to their future *discomfort*, and of appreciating the
" *difference* of an establishment set apart for the con-
" finement of Criminal Lunatics alone, and of those
" Asylums which receive within their walls those
" only whose *insanity* has never led them to acts
" punishable by the law."

It is evident that dangerous lunatics require a more vigilant superintendance, the removal of all offensive instruments, and in some cases a more efficient restraint, but especially the employment of medical skill; and these auxiliaries are amply provided in the ordinary licensed asylums. It occasionally occurs, that an insane person who has taken away the life of another, becomes afterwards tranquil and innoxious;* and there are many instances of

* A remarkable instance of this nature presented itself a few months ago when I visited the Dundee-Lunatic-Asylum, an institution conducted with superior medical skill, and where the internal management is regulated by discretion and the purest humanity. A man in a maniacal paroxysm killed his wife: before the trial he recovered his reason; but on the best evidence was proved to have been insane at the time he committed the shocking act. This unfortunate being was without restraint. The enlightened Directors of that Asylum only sought to render him comfortable, and to alleviate his sorrows; they never contemplated that he should " appreciate" the harsh discipline of a prison to force contrition in madness.

lunatics who, for years, have been mildly insane, becoming, without any evident cause transformed into the most mischievous and vindictive beings. These are the natural contingencies on mental derangement. In the event of erecting a building for this class of persons, which you consider "very "desirable," a distinction would be established unknown to the existing law: because you contemplate the discipline and degradation of a Prison destined for those lamentable objects whom the law has absolved from criminality. What you precisely mean by a "Prison expressly adapted for their "reception," is not sufficiently unfolded; but some probable conjecture may be formed by the concluding part of the sentence, which declares it to be a projected habitation, where those afflicted with "mental malady" may be capable of "appreciating "the DIFFERENCE of an establishment set apart for "the confinement of Criminal Lunatics alone, and of "those asylums which receive within their walls "those only whose insanity has never led them to "acts punishable by the law." It is correct to infer that this DIFFERENCE would be so strongly marked, so contrasted, for their "appreciation," with the humane treatment they receive in the ordinary asylums, that as long as a spark of life, or a remnant of feeling

endured, they would be painfully aware of this hopeless difference.

During a period of nearly forty years, the treatment of insanity has been my constant and professional occupation, and it has uniformly occurred, that when persons not medically educated have attempted to meddle with the regulation and care of lunatic patients, their interference has always been detrimental. Their career has usually commenced by deploring the imperfection of the prevailing system, complaining of undue restraint, and when they have discovered the intractable nature of Madness, a disease that yields not to persuasion, and despises the terrors of the law, they have had recourse to those unjustifiable severities that science has proscribed, and at which humanity revolts. In these times, when the seeds of knowledge have taken root, and the germs of future promise are expanding, it is to be hoped that the strides of mischievous authority will not trample on the expected harvest. In these times every department of the healing art is strenuously co-operating to reduce the bulk of misery and disease: and these endeavours are promoted by superior education, increased facility of instruction, and unremitting devotion to the

sources of improvement: it is therefore a natural hope that these beneficial efforts may not be chilled by the blast of power, or overturned by that sweeping dominion that seeks to fix a brand on misfortune, and to impress a stigma on the most pitiable of human afflictions.

Gentlemen,

I have the honor to subscribe myself,

Your very obedient Servant,

JOHN HASLAM.

2, *Hart Street, Bloomsbury,*
December, 1830.

Printed by G. Hayden, Little College Street, Westminster.

LIST OF WORKS BY THE AUTHOR.

OBSERVATIONS on MADNESS & MELANCHOLY. Octavo, 1809.

ILLUSTRATIONS of MADNESS. Octavo, 1810.

MEDICAL JURISPRUDENCE, as it relates to Insanity, according to the Law of England. Octavo, 1817.

CONSIDERATIONS on the MORAL MANAGEMENT of INSANE PERSONS. Octavo, 1817.

A LETTER to the GOVERNORS of BETHLEM HOSPITAL. Octavo, 1818.

SOUND MIND. Octavo, 1819.

LETTER to the LORD CHANCELLOR, on UNSOUNDNESS of MIND and Imbecility of Intellect. Octavo, 1823.

Six LECTURES on the INTELLECTUAL COMPOSITION of MAN.—*Vide Lancet for* 1827.